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## Gender differences in the micro-violence connected to the assessment process

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### Abstract

Being related to the pedagogical freedom of the teacher and her power, strengthened by students' reactive evaluations, the assessment process can generate conflicts and violence. Our purpose is to examine the gender differences regarding the micro-violence connected to the assessment process in the secondary school. Statistically significant differences between boys and girls regarding vertical and horizontal microviolence, from teacher to students or the other way around, respectively towards the colleagues, and exposure to microviolence are detected. The results suggest that significant associations between microviolence connected to assessment, self-esteem and parents' studies are moderated by the gender.

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### 1. Introduction

In the educational activity, the assessment represents almost half of the actual working time during class, but it is perceived as the least comfortable activity for both student and teacher, due to its possibility of being unfair (Perrenoud, 1993), threatening self-esteem, producing personal or family drama (Ranjard, 1984). The assessment process enables a relationship based on the power of the teacher over the student. The teacher's judgment on the student's school performance returns a judgment of the student on the official assessment, of the type correct-incorrect. The student often extends his judgment on the teacher upon the whole educational institution (Thellot, 2005), the assessment process consequently becoming a persecutory pleasure (Ranjard, 1984). According with the students' subculture, the teacher-student relationship is established in the assessment process by two principles: the mutuality

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principle, illustrated by the unwritten law of retaliation (Woods, 1990) and the balance principle, stated in the neutralization of dignity loss at public level, and of self-esteem at private level (Baumeister, 1999; Woods, 1990). Even though the power is initially held by the evaluating teacher, reactive micro-violence reverses the situation, the power being thus shifted towards the student or group of students. The consequences of such phenomena are the altering of interpersonal relations, the stressing of injustice and inequity inside the educational climate (Carra, 2009; Cocoradă, Clinciu, Luca, & Pavalache-Ilie, 2008). We suppose that these emotions are also felt horizontally, the conflicts being present among students as well, as a result of the constant threats of the social image and of the egotism via informal assessments situated under self-assessment, as is the case with bullying or any other type of violence (Baumeister, 1999). The involvement of the teacher in a conflict with the students crashes the mythical image of school and adolescence alike (Perrenoud, 1993). In this context, the teachers are obliged to find expensive survival strategies among a heterogeneous population, with divergent values and differing cognitive levels (Lantheaume, & H  lou, 2008; Galand, Philippot, & Lecocq, 2006; Goddet, 2006).

Gender studies on the violence in schools show that boys break the rules more often than girls, are more violent compared to female students especially for physical violence, but the differences are smaller concerning the verbal aggression (McIntyre, & Edwards, 2009; Fuchs, 2008).

## 2. Purpose of study

The features of the assessment process and of the teacher-student relationship in the contemporary school, described in the above quoted works, as well as our own observations on the educational environment have led to the introduction of the concept ‘microviolence as connected to the assessment process’, which we have described in various researches. The assessment of the teacher and the informal assessment of the colleagues may be followed by actions of appeal, interpellation, physical or verbal violence, sarcasm, exclusion, thus turning the teacher and the colleagues into a victim (Cocoradă, & Clinciu, 2009; Cocoradă et al, 2008). To name this phenomenon we have chosen to use the term ‘micro-violence’, the suitability of which to the school has already been demonstrated (Debarbieux, 2006).

In the current article, we aim to present only the gender differences in the case of micro-violence connected to the assessment process. This study hypothesized that, when assessed, boys are the authors of some micro-violence deeds towards the teachers and their colleagues more often than girls and feel as victims of an unfair assessment more often than their feminine correspondents.

## 3. Method

The participants are 618 high-school students, aged between 15 and 18 ( $M=16.27$ ,  $SD=1.15$ ), males (302) and females (316). The research took place in two types of school: three top-class high-schools and four low-ranked high-schools, in the 2008-2009 school years. The used instruments were the School Micro-violence Questionnaire (SMvQ) and the short version of the Rosenberg Self-esteem Inventory. The socio-demographic data about participants were collected concerning age, gender, grade, parents’ level of education, number of siblings and rank in brotherhood. The semester school results for Romanian and Mathematics were registered and the overall annual results of each participant, too.

The SMvQ (Cocoradă et al, 2008) is composed of three scales: being the author of micro-violence connected to the assessment process, being its victim, and being a witness of it (exposure to micro-violence). These scales find their correspondence on three axes, later found in the literature (Carra, 2009): the act itself (micro-violence), the feeling (victimization) and the perception (exposure to micro-violence). The model we designed stresses the first two axes, dividing violence and victimization in vertical and horizontal, both being important in the evaluation process. The alpha Cronbach coefficients

indicate good internal consistency for all scales: 0.91 for the ‘vertical micro-violent behaviours’; 0.76 for the ‘victimization’ and 0.83 for ‘exposure to micro-violence’.

#### 4. Results

The average scores obtained by boys (m) and girls (f) on the investigated variables, as well as the size effect are presented. It is observed that girls get lower scores on micro-violence. The descriptive statistics for vertical microviolence were:  $M(f)=7.55$ ,  $M(m)=8.56$ ,  $t=3.92$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cohen’s  $d=0.32$  and for the microviolence manifested towards their colleagues  $M(f)=4.35$ ,  $M(m)=4.81$ ,  $t=2.95$ ,  $p<.003$ , Cohen’s  $d=0.25$ . As well as on victimization the descriptive statistics were: for vertical victimization  $M(f)=5.91$ ,  $M(m)=7.18$ ,  $t=5.21$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cohen’s  $d=0.30$  and for horizontal victimization ( $M(f)=2.33$ ,  $M(m)=2.58$ ,  $t=2.80$ ,  $p<.005$ , Cohen’s  $d=0.23$ ). The descriptive statistics for exposure to violence were:  $M(f)=32.57$ ,  $M(m)=36.29$ ,  $t=3.68$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cohen’s  $d=0.32$ . At the same time, it is the girls who get better school performance as compared to the boys: for the mathematics annual average ( $t=8.08$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cohen’s  $d=0.76$ ), for the Romanian Language annual average ( $t=10.21$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cohen’s  $d=0.88$ ) and for Mark Average ( $t=9.09$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cohen’s  $d=0.86$ ). As far as the number of siblings and the position in brotherhood are concerned, the Mann-Whitney U test shows that the average scores of boys and girls are very close and the significance levels are low ( $Z=0.08$ , respectively  $Z=0.04$ ).

The study of the correlations between the relevant variables on the whole sample shows that the students who acknowledge having committed micro-violence deeds towards their teachers during the assessment process also admit having been violent to their colleagues in the same situation. They consider themselves to be victims of both the teachers’ micro-violence ( $r=0.514$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and of the one of their colleagues ( $r=0.306$ ,  $p<.001$ ). These students perceive the whole educational environment as a micro-violent space ( $r=0.512$ ,  $p<.001$ ). But who are these students? The ones who register low results in Romanian language learning (mother tongue) ( $r=-0.290$ ,  $p<.005$ ) and Mathematics ( $r=-0.230$ ,  $p<.001$ ), lower overall average results ( $r=-0.321$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and a low self-esteem level ( $r=-0.156$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Of these, the ones who feel victims of their colleagues during the assessment process (horizontal victimization) have more siblings ( $r=0.109$ ,  $p<.008$ ) and come from families where the mothers have a low education level ( $r=-0.118$ ,  $p<.003$ ).

The data analysis according to the high-school type brings forward interesting findings. The scores of the studied variables in the two types of high-schools are significantly different, with  $t$  ranging between 4.73 and 30.19, all significance levels being lower than 0.001. The data analysis on the subgroups ‘top-class high-schools’ and ‘low-ranked high-schools’ indicates statistically significant differences in point of gender only in the case of top-class high-schools. In these high-schools, the statistically significant differences between boys and girls are noticeable in their average results in Romanian Language learning ( $t=2.9$ ,  $p<0.005$ ), overall average results ( $t=2.04$ ,  $p<0.04$ ), vertical microviolence ( $t=2.166$ ,  $p<0.35$ ), total victimization ( $t=1.80$ ,  $p<0.07$ ). In the group of low-ranked high-schools, the scores of boys and girls on the three components of micro-violence are very close, not presenting statistically significant differences. Only self-esteem registers a higher average with boys as compared to girls ( $t=2.93$ ,  $p<0.004$ ).

In order to control the effect of gender on the correlations between the main variables, we have separated the sample into two subgroups. The highly significant correlation coefficients are presented in table 1. All correlation coefficients presented are significant at the level 0.001, except the correlation between vertical and horizontal microviolence ( $p<0.03$ ) and vertical victimization and school attendance years of mother ( $p<0.008$ ).

Table 1. Correlation coefficients for the two genders for the relevant variables

Variables	Gender		Global micro-violence	Vertical micro-violence	Vertical victimization	Horizontal victimization	Exposure to microviolence	School attendance years		Self-esteem
								Mother	Father	
Vertical violence	F	r	0.705	0.127	0.455	0.303	0.545	-	-	-0.224
	M	r	0.710	0.191	0.535	0.376	0.550	-	-	-
Vertical victimization	F	r	0.730	0.161	1	0.285	0.594	-0.155	-	-0.257
	M	r	0.805	0.164	1	0.295	0.665	-	-	-0.218

## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

The current study examined the gender differences in the case of micro-violence as connected to the assessment process, in secondary school. The hypothesis concerning the greater presence of micro-violence connected to the assessment process in the case of boys as compared to girls is confirmed in all aspects. We found that boys register higher scores in the case of micro-violence towards the teachers and colleagues as compared to girls, they feel the victims of subjective assessment and micro-violence from their colleagues more often, and they perceive the educational climate as being more threatening and full of micro-violence events during the assessment process. The effect size based on means is strong for school results, medium for total victimization (vertical and horizontal), being nonetheless weak for the other variables. Boys state, much more often than girls, that they have witnessed micro-violence exercised upon other students in such situations. In the case of low-ranked high-schools, boys register a considerably higher self-esteem than girls, but the girls register better school results. To conclude, micro-violence in the assessment is associated to poor school results, and in the case of the industrial/apprentice schools with a higher level of self-esteem, probably threatened by the poor grades. The boys as victim are at the same time aggressors/ bullies and perceive the assessment climate as being threatening and unfair, similar with other forms of violence (McIntyre & Edwards, 2009; Fuchs, 2008).

In order to control the effect of the 'gender' on the most relevant associations of the variables, the sample has been divided in two subgroups. The results show that the associations between vertical micro-violence and the other components of micro-violence in assessment situations are stronger with boys than with girls. We could state that the gender is a moderator of micro-violence in assessment situations.

Eventually, we conclude that the micro-violence connected to the assessment process is built around poor school results, which generate frustration and are considered unfair by the students, thus generating the type of micro-violence pointed towards the teachers and the colleagues. We consider the school grades as a direct feedback of the relationships between teacher and students, but the perception of the grades is variable and depends on the students' expectations. The most prominent finding of our work is that the micro-violence connected to the assessment is encountered in all high-school types, but is more frequent in the case of low-ranked high-schools. Studies on other types of violence from the educational environment sustain that violence concentrates in a limited number of schools (Fuchs, 2008; Pain, 2006). Probably, in the case of the micro-violence connected to the assessment process, adolescents with a confused identity feel more threatened by the negative assessments of the teachers or of their colleagues and give a violent answer to low grades or to the absence of appreciation from other significant evaluators. Such behaviours are underlined in the case of numerous other types of violence as well (Baumeister, 1999; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982).

The results we obtained concerning micro-violence connected to the assessment process are in many aspects similar to the ones of other studies dealing with violence in the educational environment: boys

declare themselves more violent than girls, the victims are at the same time aggressors, the school climate is perceived as bad by both aggressors and victims. Therefore, the analysis of multiple regression equations present in the processed articles have come to the conclusion that the reporting of the aggression deeds grows as the victimization level of the participants grows (Unnever, & Cornell, 2004). The limitations of our study are related with the self reports of the microviolence and with the qualities of the proposed concept 'micro-violence connected to the assessment' and associated tool, the SMvQ.

We believe that knowing the adolescents' reactions towards the formal appreciations given by the teacher, and towards the informal ones given by their colleagues could contribute to the proper management of the assessing behaviour of the teachers, to designing an assessment culture based on technical, ethical and deontological norms. This culture should be shared by all participants in the educational process and governed by common values.

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